

Preservice Teachers' Criticality in Analysing School English Teaching Materials: Gender Representation and Islamic Perspective

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Abstract

This article reports on teacher trainees' ability in doing a critical analysis of an extract of English teaching materials from a gender perspective. The critical ability was prompted using a textbook extract that generated two gender issues, namely woman-man relationship and the position of women in occupational discourse. The participants were 38 trainees enrolled in textbook analysis subject in the English Department of a college in regional Indonesia. The research data were the trainees' results of the mid-term test, designed with explicit instruction to ascertain the afore-mentioned critical elements, and their results of the final exam with implied instruction to discern the same critical elements. The data were analysed qualitatively by interpreting the participants' responses based on their degree of criticality. The mid-term test results show that more than half of them were critical about woman-man relationship, while only 18% were critical about women position at work. The trainees' results in the final test demonstrate a significant downturn of their critical thinking performances. Only 15% criticized woman-man relationship and 13% problematized women position at work. These findings raise concerns about the trainees' level of criticality and so systematic efforts to sharpen trainees' critical analytical ability should be further attempted.

Keywords: Critical analysis; gender perspective; English teaching materials; religious values; women position

Introduction

Curriculum and materials development at any university in Indonesia should refer to the National Qualification Frameworks to enhance the graduates' quality and competitiveness at the national and global levels (Budiharso, 2016, p. 1; Jono, 2016; Solikhah, 2016, pp. 20-21). One of

the specific descriptions of the Indonesian National Qualification Framework (INQF) Level 6, for undergraduate education, is that the graduates can apply their field of expertise as well as use their set of knowledge, technology and arts acquired to solve problems and adapt to unpredictable circumstances (Solikhah, 2016, p. 22). In an English education major, one way to implement the description is for the students to make, modify, or develop English teaching curriculum, syllabus, materials, methods, assessment, and evaluation (Solikhah, 2016, p. 26). Furthermore, one learning outcome of English education major based on the INQF Level 6 is that students undertake a critical book report which trains them to critique a sample of academic or art work through identifying problems, implicit aspects of the problems and factors indispensably required for solving the problems (A. Saragih, Haswani, & Lubis, 2017; F. Saragih, Pulungan, & Dewi, 2017).

Moreover, schools anticipate preservice teachers' critical ability. Indonesian Government Regulation No. 17 of 2010, in relation to educational management, stipulates that high school students be taught to be "knowledgeable, critical, creative and innovative" The regulation appendix further explains that the word "critical" refers to critical thinking (Fakhomah & Utami, 2019; Solihati & Hikmat, 2018). To realize this regulation, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture developed school curricula that oblige teachers to educate their students to develop critical thinking skills, or what is popularly termed, "higher-order thinking skills" or HOTS (Indriyana & Kuswandono, 2019; Warmadewi, Agustini, & Wedhanti, 2019). In practice, HOTS is defined as the three upper levels of cognition based on revised Bloom's Taxonomy, namely "analyse", "evaluate", and "create" (Atiullah, Fitriati, & Rukmini, 2019; Brookhart, 2010; Fitriani, 2019; Indriyana & Kuswandono, 2019).

We argue that lying at the centre of critical analytical skill development is the teaching material, especially the textbooks. In many contexts, textbooks constitute the curriculum that accommodates the learning objectives, the syllabus, skills, methodologies, and serve as a bridge between the teachers and students. The teachers use textbooks as guides, while the learners may find them the most useful source of input; and for both teachers and learners, the textbooks may serve as encounters for negotiating critical issues (Lee & Bathmaker, 2007, p. 353; Limberg, 2016). Textbooks are considered the strongest engine of socialization (Foroutan, 2012). Language textbooks are powerful in directing what a beginning learner attempts to express in the target language and stand up for the learner's cultures (Hjelm et al., 2019). As textbooks bring to bear a strong influence on learners' minds, writers or teachers should address and revise any textbook potential misrepresentations (Medawattegedera, 2017). Hence, how textbooks play a substantial role in fostering learners' critical thinking skills should seriously be considered (Solihati & Hikmat, 2018).

English textbooks, at the national and global levels, have not been escaped from a critical analysis. That is, quite unanimously researchers recommend that teachers and learners be equipped with knowledge and tools to be aware of misleading content in the textbooks (e.g., Adel & Enayat, 2016, pp. 112-113; Awayed-Bishara, 2015, p. 539; Fahriany, Alek, & Wekke, 2018, p. 162; Hamidah, 2017, p. 221; Miranda & Nurbatra, 2019, p. 56; Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008, p. 79). However, to date, no research on preservice teacher training on the critical analysis of textbook content has been done. Thus, a fundamental issue put forward in this research is the urgency for preservice English teachers to have critical analytical skills that can be applied in analysing school English textbooks before they use them in teaching. Thus, critical thinking is assumed to afford the ability on the part of teachers and students to discern issues of social injustices.

This research is a preliminary effort to develop preservice teachers' critical thinking skills by focusing on the issue of gender misrepresentation. The issue is narrowed to how the preservice

teachers, female or male, can identify, explain, and interpret gender biases in the teaching materials or textbooks they will use. Included in the interpretation is to what extent the preservice teachers can contextualize the teaching materials with their own and student contexts even when the materials are decontextualized or present as ‘cultureless’ (Taki, 2008). Thus, preservice teachers should have the skills to unpack the hidden messages within textbooks before their use in the classroom (Waseem, 2015, p. 68).

To fulfil the purposes of the research, the researchers set forth an extract of an English textbook, appropriate to two units of analysis, to ascertain related levels of critical thinking of the participants. The methods were in response to the research questions for the study, namely: (1) What are the teacher trainees’ religious perceptions about woman-man relationship and women’s position in occupational discourse in the teaching extract? (2) What are their own perceptions about the same extract (without the word ‘religious’ explicitly included in the instruction)? Adding ‘religious’ perception in the question is because believers normally use their religious knowledge as principles guiding their behaviour. On the other hand, the word absence in the second question aims to find out whether the participants can refer to any religious or social norms that they are assumed to uphold when no external prompts are available.

Literature review

Gender representation refers to a cultural construction of either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. The term also denotes a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female. To provide a theoretical foothold, we review research studies on gender representations in English textbooks and in the Islamic perspective, with highlight found on women.

Gender representation in english textbooks

Recent studies on Indonesian English textbooks for junior and senior high schools published by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and private publishers show similar findings that coalesce around conversational turn taking and the distribution of social and professional roles. Concerning involvement in dialogs, women are described as ones talking much about feeling, and only proposing ideas and letting decisions taken by men (Abidah & Utama, 2019; Asriyama, Saleh, & Fitriati, 2020). With social and professional roles, women are typically described as having to educate children and be responsible for daily chores (food, clothes, and cleanliness) in the household, accept decisions in the community, and serve as subordinates at work (Asriyama et al., 2020; Hamidah, 2017). Nonetheless, with such roles, women are concluded as “less active and sociable” and inferior (Abidah & Utama, 2019; Hamidah, 2017). Hamidah (2017, p. 221) and Fahriany et al. (2018, p. 159) contend that discrepancies presented in the English textbooks are not compatible with reality in Indonesia where males and females have equitable access to work roles and benefiting from working with each other.

Concerning English textbooks in the global contexts, we have surveyed 11 studies about textbooks produced and used in Iran (Foroutan, 2012), Finland (Hjelm et al., 2019), Pakistan (Khan, Sultana, Bughio, & Naz, 2014), Sri Lanka (Medawattegedera, 2017), and Malaysia (Mukundan & Nimehchisalem, 2008). Besides this corpus of work, there are three gender-related studies in English textbooks for global use, namely “New Crown” used in Japan (Clark, 2015), “Oxford English for Careers” (Adel & Enayat, 2016) and “Summit” series (Rashidi & Ghaedsharafi, 2015). All these studies share two main findings and several different

interpretations. The main findings are that women primarily play traditional roles as mothers and wives with household responsibilities. Furthermore, they have limited or neglected career options outside the house. This construction is interpreted differently depending on the researchers' context or country. One main interpretation is that the construction negates the reality of women's role in the country and beyond. This is the case with the studies in Japan, Sri Lanka, Finland, and the New Crown Series. Another interpretation is that the construction mirrors the socio-political reality in the country; this is the case with studies in Pakistan and Iran. Finally, the female traditional construction is considered a disadvantage to women, except for the study in Malaysia where the construction is described not as negative as views on the male counterpart.

Gender representation in Islamic perspective

The review of women in Islamic perspective provides related contexts and knowledge about the present research participants' religious and social values, as well as the broader context of the participants, namely Indonesia where Islam is embraced by 87% of its 260 million people (Hidayat & Darmadi, 2019, p. 201). We found that recent research on gender representation in the Islamic perspective focuses on three issues, namely Islamic feminism, women's transformation, and women's relationship with the community.

First, Islamic feminism refers to the movement to emancipate women and men from stupidity and all kinds of discrimination. That is, Islam serves as a blessing for the universe and God guides and values humans – both female and male – based not on their gender type, but the degree of piety (Munir, 2006; Qibtiyah, 2009, p. 185). Parvanova (2012) argues that Islamic values go hand in hand with democracy and feminism; related to gender equality and justice for all. Yet, Lone, Bashir, and Karima (2015, p. 42) highlight the difference between west-driven and Islamic feminism which assumes freedom that is led by Islamic values.

Second, all studies indicate that Muslim women in the world have been transformed towards advancement. In any part of the world, Muslim women are, largely, in good health and optimum education, and at an equal level with men (Offenhauer, 2005, p. 93). In the Indonesian context, studies by Qibtiyah (2009), Parvanova (2012) and Azmi, Ismail, and Basir (2014) suggest a stage of advancement in which women and men have an equal access to education and career paths, and successfully collaborate with each other in professional roles. Nurlaelawati and Salim (2013) found that the Indonesian bureaucracy has applied relevant policies and made available facilities to make sure that Muslim women justly take part in making decisions.

Third, Muslim women's relationship with the community and male counterparts can be seen in two ways. One is how Muslim women express themselves outside their house or in the community. A study in a New York City neighbourhood by Johnson and Miles (2014) is very relevant to explain this issue. They found that physical public space availability is very vital to Muslim women. The public conveniences that are full of light, easily visible by the community, and attended by some other women with the Islamic veils allowed the Muslim women to be social actors and so increased their sense of inclusion and involvement. They found the spaces suitable for their cultural, religious, and social needs. On the other hand, the presence of Muslim women in a lonely place with less light, hardly visible by the community, and worse attended by men to whom they have no legal or marital binding increased their sense of exclusion and being in jeopardy. According to Bukhari (2018, p. 111), the togetherness of a man and a woman out of wedlock, in a lonely place with no visibility of the community, other family members, or other people, gives them a chance to do evil. Such a togetherness alone (apart from the evil being done or not), which is called *khalwat* in Islamic law, is codified as forbidden, as stated in the Qur'an

Chapter Al-Isra' Verse 32, "And do not approach adultery. Truly, adultery is an abomination and a bad path." This verse points out that the forbidden path is not only adultery, but also anything that may take one to doing it.

Research methods

Research context

This research was a lesson study as a particular type of classroom action research that aims to develop teacher trainees' practical knowledge (Doig & Groves, 2011; Dudley, 2014). This research was situated in the teaching a subject termed "Textbook Analysis" in an English Department of an education college in regional Indonesia. The subject was offered in Semester VI with two lecture hours per week lasting 16 weeks. The subject content comprised two main parts, i.e. task analysis (Littlejohn, 2011) and critical representational analysis (Jazadi, 2008, 2015; Paltridge, 2000). The critical representation analysis was taught in weeks 6-15 (10 meetings) and covered six topics, namely sociocultural, socioeconomic, gender, lifestyle, and locality representations, and the theory of critical analysis. The teaching of the representational aspects made use of extracts from mandatory junior and senior high school English textbooks published by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture.

The eighth meeting was designed as a mid-term exam consisting of two parts, one of which was a task for the teacher trainees to do a critical analysis of a textbook extract focusing on gender issues. The trainees had never seen the extract before. To lead the trainees' attention to gender issues in the extract, the lecturer provided two guiding questions for the participants to answer in an essay form. Based on the mid-term results, the lecturer concluded that the trainees still lacked the skills of doing a critical analysis and the ninth meeting was dedicated to the lecturer's video lesson of the steps and aspects of a critical analysis (Paltridge, 2000). Then, meetings 10-14 focused on doing a critical analysis on the textbook extracts representing gender, lifestyle, and locality issues (Jazadi, 2008). The activities included the lecturer's video presentation of the extracts, the lecturer and the trainees doing discussions, and the trainees' writing a critical analysis guided by what they had learnt from the videos and discussion.

With all of these meetings, it was assumed that the teacher trainees had a good foundation for doing a critical analysis of English textbook extracts. Therefore, the last meeting was used for the final exam by assigning the trainees to do a critical analysis of two extracts, one of which was the same as that used in the mid-term exam, but this extract was never explained or presented by the lecturer to the trainees. Thus, the extract was still novel to the participants and it was assumed that they knew how to analyse critically using their general knowledge and self-search of references (Brookhart, 2010, p. 17). This research focused on the same textbook extract used both in the mid-term and final exams.

Participant recruitment

The participants of this research were 38 (14 male and 24 female) sixth semester teacher trainees who studied the Textbook Analysis subject. All of them happened to be Muslim because the college was located in a province with Muslims constituting 96.43% of its population (BPS NTB, 2018). All participants had received information and signed their consent form that their results in the mid-term and final tests would be used as research data regarding teacher trainees' critical ability in analysing textbook extracts, while their privacy and anonymity were guaranteed to be confidential. Prior to teaching the subject, the researcher team had gained ethical approval from the university research and community service institute.

Procedure of data collection

The researchers collected data from the mid-term exam and the final-term exam, especially from the teacher trainees' critical analysis of an English textbook extract. The participants did both exams online in LMS Moodle that was set to be attempted only once for the duration of 45 minutes. The first researcher was the lecturer in the subject under study and so he readily got access all the data.

Exam instrument and validation

The instrument for the mid-term and final-term exams were a textbook extract, namely the reading passage of *The 2013 Curriculum English for SMA/SMK/MA/MAK*, Year X, Semester 1, Chapter IV, Task 1 (Jazadi, 2015, p. 324; Kemdikbud RI, 2014, pp. 45-46), as presented in Figure 1.

CONGRATULATIONS!

Nura arrives in a big city to help her parents settle their debts. She moves into Juna's house as a hired servant. In the house, Juna is a rich and proud young man who inherits his father's business. He is lazy and goes to campus just to meet friends and chase pretty girls who love his wealth.

In his chaotic life, Juna is betrayed by his own cousin and uncle leading to his downfall. Juna's life is in a real mess. However, Nura helps him gain his confidence and reorganize his life. Nura begins to teach the rich spoiled brat some manners through her down to earth scolding and no-nonsense attitude. The girl helps him pick up the pieces in his life, from defeat to success. Finally, after a long struggle and hard work, he can regain his life. He is now in the position of the director of the company that he inherits from his father.

Many of his friends congratulate him. Johnny, his best friend, says, "Congratulations! You deserved it, man."

[...]

Again, he answers those expressions contentedly, "It's very good of you to say so," "How nice of you to say that,"

"Thank you very much for saying so."

Nura observes this event from the backdoor. She cries happily for her master who has changed into a mature, stable young man.

Figure 1. The textbook extract

In each exam, the teacher trainees received an instruction that is substantially the same, but formulated more explicitly in the mid-term exam, while more implicitly in the final exam. The instruction for the preservice teachers in the mid-term exam was "Please write a critical analysis of the textbook content with regard to (1) woman-man relationship from the viewpoint of your religion, and (2) the position of women in occupational or professional discourse." The instruction in the final exam was "Please critically analyse the textbook content concerning the jobs done by the woman and the gender equity she should deserve." The instruction in the final exam was less explicit because it was assumed that the trainees had been well trained in doing a critical analysis and so they would know what to include in their analysis. In addition, prior to its use, the instrument was validated by three English lecturers (graduating from universities in Australia) that

the extract and each of the instructions would be able to measure the degree of the teacher trainees' criticality regarding gender issues.

Procedure of data analysis

The theory underpinning the data analysis is that of analysing texts from a critical view (Brookhart, 2010, p. 17; Paltridge, 2000, pp. 157-161). With this tool, the participants' critical analyses would fall into non-critical and critical categories. Non-critical analyses include those that simply take the explicit information for granted and discuss or address it in a supporting way. Critical analyses consist of those that not only accommodate the explicit information objectively, but also most importantly may discuss it from different perspectives and go beyond by showing hidden, backgrounded, left, and omitted information.

The instruments for doing the analysis were the three researchers, who read the participants' works several times and compared each of our understanding before grouping them and taking sample quotes to be presented in the report. Each finding in the study is supported by relevant or sample quotes from the participants' work (coded as the participant initial at the end of the quote).

Thus, the data analysis was done in two levels. Level 1 focuses on the participants' results of the mid-term exam that prompted the participants critical responses to the textbook extract based on their religious perspective on man-woman relationship and their general perspective on women position at work. Level 2 focuses on the participants' results of the final exam that required the preservice teachers to apply criticality based on their own range of knowledge and values on the same issues in the extract. Thus, it would be interesting to see whether the participants were able to be critical because they were directed to use a point of view and because they could direct themselves to the view.

Results

This research served to investigate the teacher trainees' religious perceptions about woman-man relationship and women's position in occupational discourse in an English textbook extract, and their own perceptions about the same extract when the word 'religious' was not explicitly included in the instruction.

As the data were unfolded, the teacher trainees' critical analytical works both in the mid-term and final term exams fall into two categories, namely: critical and non-critical. Critical analyses include those trainees' analyses that capture serious or problematic issues hidden in the texts. The non-critical analyses fall into three categories. First, the copied or imitative are those that simply copy and paste some or all information in the reading text without any inferences. Second the superficial category refers to those analyses that are not well presented, only demonstrate some understanding of stated information, and show little or no understanding of serious issues hidden in the text. Third, the fair category include those analyses that are quite well presented and explain important issues that are explicit in the text, but show little or no understanding of serious issues hidden in the text. It is interesting to see how the different levels of analyses are evident in the participants' works in the mid-term and final term exams as presented below.

Teacher trainees' criticality when particular perspectives are explicitly mentioned in the mid-term exam instruction

Two issues in the extract were asked in the mid-term test. The first is about the teacher trainees' religious views on man-woman relationship and the second is about the position of women in a work context.

The issue of man-woman relationship

In the issue of man-woman relationship, we found that, of 38 participants, 20 wrote critical analyses and 15 non-critical analyses (11 fair, 3 superficial, 4 copied). The twenty participants were critical by pointing out a hidden message in the text, namely a focal point about a man and a woman cohabiting by referring to Juna and Nura staying in a house, as in the following sample quote:

"In that story, there are no other people or Juna's families. Thus, I can say that there are just two people in that house. Thus, this relationship in Islam is not allowed. The Prophet Muhammad sallallaahu 'alayhi wa sallam said, "It is not permissible for a man to be alone with a woman unless Satan will be the third." (YM)

The preservice teachers generally define the relationship of Juna and Nura in the text as a man and a woman without legal or marriage relation staying together in one place without the presence of others. Such a relationship is also seen as a form or part of adultery although there is no explicit evidence that they have sexual relationship. It is "strictly prohibited by religion" (S). This ban certainly has reasons and wisdom" (DH). According to the preservice teachers' analyses, the fact that a man and a woman stay in a lonely place would cause "possibility of liking arises between them" (NH) and "invite a third party which is Satan or devil that influences them to commit a mortal sin of adultery" (SY), which would lead to "punishment from God the Almighty" (NL). Even when a man and a woman who stay in a lonely place are not proven having any sexual relationship, they would be seen causing slander and negative perceptions that affect social harmony in the vicinity (APH, AH, RA). The relationship of Juna and Nura in the textbook extract would cause "negative thoughts from students, especially vocational or high school students, who are teenagers, who may not have a critical perspective on things that deviate such as in the text" (SU). While the participants were concerned with cohabiting by Juna and Nura, none had spotlighted about Juna and "pretty girls who love his wealth", which implies that Juna changes partners anytime, cohabits with them, and pays them some money in return.

In addition, there are also power relations in the text that merit religious consideration. Two participants gave their views as in the following quotes:

"It is not permissible at all, this is the opinion of the majority of Islamic scholars (i.e.: Hanafiyah, Malikiyah and Shafi'iyah). Imam Abu Hanifah said: "I hate (i.e. forbid) men to hire free women, to be used as servants and to be alone with them." (SM)

"The teachings of Islam place women in a proper position, giving their rights perfectly without any consideration." (D)

In the above quote, SM referred to three of four schools of thought concerning Muslim law to judge the relationship between Juna and Nura and the pretty girls as unjust power relationships

of master and hired servants. These power relationships are explicitly evident in the extract through diction such as ‘hired servant’ and ‘master’. All positive contributions of Nura to Juna’s then great life were subsumed and therefore nullified by her role as a hired servant. This explains why she was given no place and mention in the master’s success celebration. Therefore, SM correctly quoted the leading Muslim law scholar Abu Hanifah who forbids men hiring “free women, to be used as servants and to be alone with them”. The hired servant role degrades women’s honour in front of men and so women should not be in this position because, as D pointed out, Islam gives them proper position and rights without reserve.

On the other hand, 18 of 38 preservice teachers wrote non-critical analyses. Eleven of the 18 are in the fair category, implying that they understood and could explain good points from the explicit messages in the text, yet they failed to be critical of the bigger and more serious issues implied in the text. A focal point raised by all participants in this fair category is the deed of helping others, as in the sample quote below:

“It is natural that humans are created to be able to help one another who are experiencing difficulties. Islam as rahmatan lil alamin cannot be separated from the teachings to help one another. Islam also requires all people to help one another” (BS)

In the quote, BS showed a very positive view of helping others. She saw the deed of helping others as *rahmatan lil allamin* (blessing to the universe). Other participants described the deed of helping others in a similar way as ‘sharing is the real happiness’ (FI), ‘mutually beneficial... like brothers and sisters who help each other’ (EM), ‘obligatory deed’ (YK), ‘a kind deed’ (MS). All of these analyses were explanations of the text’s explicit messages that Nura was a helpful personality throughout the text by changing Juna’s life from a mess to success. In seeing the relationship of Nura and Juna in a helping lens, the participants indicated that the relationship had no negative effect. They described the relationship as ‘nothing special’ (YK), ‘actually fine’ (RH), ‘appropriate’ and ‘within reasonable limits’ (IS), ‘natural’ (II), ‘no badness’ (FI), ‘not forbidden because it is done with good intentions from the two people proven by the fact that Nura is able to fix Juna’s life from a real mess’ (FS).

In addition, three quotes in the superficial category (arranged less neatly) also present Nura as a helpful angel and even a best friend of Juna who was once a lazy and bad boy (IJ, FT, RF), while one quote simply echoes the text’s explicit information (TDP).

All the explanations above are logical about what is clearly stated in the text, not critical because the preservice teachers failed to dig deeper into messages that lie underneath. In other words, they are unaware of serious matters coming out from the text’s cultural and situational contexts.

The issue of women’s position at work

Concerning the position of women at work, we found that, of 38 participants, 28 wrote non-critical analyses of superficial (26), and copied (5) categories, while the other seven participants wrote quite critical analyses. Those non-critical analyses put Nura, the female main character in the spotlight, describing her as a ‘very professional’ (SM, NH, BS, RF, HDM, YH, UA, JZ, SN), ‘skilled’, ‘independent’ (FI) or ‘free’ (RA), ‘social’ (YK), ‘meritorious’ (RH), ‘caring’ (AH) ‘figure of warrior’ (BS) who ‘plays an important role’ (HDM) in changing Juna’s life into success. Using this lens, it makes sense to claim that ‘Nura is Juna’s friend or has the same level as Juna’ (APH). SY even compared Nura’s role to that normally associated with a dedicated wife as he

wrote, ‘Behind all the success that we have achieved there is also the role of someone who has struggled and helped us in achieving everything.’ According to FT, there is ‘nothing wrong’ with Nura’s position at work because ‘servants are free human beings who provide power services in domestic work’ (EM). AR supported by arguing that ‘the relationship between men and women in terms of work has become a common thing, for example in our country and other large Islamic countries.’ This is in line with FS’ view that ‘working and earning a living are the obligations of men and women. She stressed that taking care of domestic problems such as cooking, washing clothes, sewing clothes and looking after children are also a collective obligation of both men and women.

Unlike those positive attributes associated with Nura, seven other preservice teachers offered fair views. SY argued that there is a socioeconomic gap of a superior and subordinate or between the lord and the house cleaner between Juna and Nura in the story. YK observed that hired servants are the only perceived powerless jobs in the reality of Indonesia. This might explain why the male Juna did not invite her to his success celebration foreground, as pointed out below:

“He never thanked her and she was still in the backdoor when his success was celebrated. He should not become ignorant to her because even though she was a servant, she has been meritorious for him. Thus, we can conclude that...she was still underestimated” (NL)

Thus, HS viewed that Nura’s heroic role in the extract is ‘not compatible with the fact’ that a hired servant is normally low in education, underestimated, and could only handle house chores. Quite alike, DP contested that ‘there is no professionalism between Nura and Juna at work. In the reading, it was explained that Nura helped Juna to rise from his failure. It is not included in the duties of a servant.’ Thus, DP conceived Nura being a personal counsellor or consultant to Juna could not be part of a household servant job description. According to SU, because Nura works as a hired servant to redeem her parents’ debts, school students who read this text would think that Nura’s job is not good, or even think that she is selling herself. Therefore, SB emphasized that the position of working women as domestic servants is not allowed except under certain circumstances.’ The circumstances were explained by YM as in the following quote:

“The position of women in occupation is okay but better in someone’s house, which has a family in it. Actually, women’s work must be free from things that endanger their religion and honour; a woman will forever be valuable and will always be respected when she is able to maintain her dignity well according to what Allah has established in Islam”

To sum up, Nura’s position at work is quite complicated. The majority of the participants accepted her role very positively, while some others saw it critically and offered suggestions to overcome its potential negative effects.

Teacher trainees’ criticality when the critical points are not explicitly mentioned in the final exam instruction

Some seven weeks after the midterm exam, with the full load of different classes during the weeks, the preservice teachers were faced again with one part of the textbook analysis final test that consisted of exactly the same extract and substantially the same instructions, but was

delivered in a less explicit way. That is, the preservice teachers were asked to analyse the text concerning the jobs done by the woman and the gender equity she should deserve, with no mention of religious perspective and the position of women at work. Yet, we assumed that they would exert any knowledge and values they had, including their religious one in showing their criticality. Therefore, their views are also grouped into those about man-woman relationship and gender position or equity at work.

The issue of man-woman relationship

The final test results showed that, of 38 participants, 26 had copied and pasted the text in question and one had an unrelated view to the topic, and so the participants of this category did not do any analysis at all. The other 11 participants had produced analyses, namely 5 superficial non-critical ones and six critical analyses.

The non-critical analyses describe man-woman relationships in the text as something positively normal and human. FI described Juna as someone who needs ‘a person’s hand to help’. YK and SN described Nura as a good, sincere, and persistent girl who not only helps her family, but also Juna, her boss. FT judged that it is humane if ‘a boy and a girl need each other’. Finally, SB stated that ‘the problem here Nura and Juna live in one house’, but she did not explain it any further. On the other hand, the six critical analyses clearly refer to the participants’ religious points of view that unmarried men and women cannot live in one house. They viewed it as a serious matter that would bring negative effects such as being tempted to commit sexual intercourse, as in the following quote:

“However, in the view of religion, it is not fitting for two people of the opposite sex to live together, even if they do not do things that are forbidden by religion. It is because we do not know and guarantee that they will not make a mistake and because the temptations of Satan are so real and Islam forbids it even though they help each other to achieve a positive thing that is a success.” (SW)

SW not only used her Islamic perspective as a guiding principle, but also put a positive thought on Juna and Nura’s mutual helping relationship and that they do not do forbidden things on some occasions. However, she highlighted that being two in a quiet place on many other occasions would invite devil temptations in the hearts of the man and the woman to do something fun, but forbidden in the religious perspective.

The issue of women’s position at work

Regarding the position of women at work, 23 participants wrote non-critical analyses (10 imitated and 23 superficial analyses), and five wrote critical analyses. The superficial analyses take Nura as a focal personality in a work context, describing her in adjectives, verbs, and nouns. In adjectives, Nura is described as smart (APH), persistent, sincere (YH), gentle, merciful (MS), affectionate (RH), independent (BS), good (SB), concerned (YH), important (SW), successful (DH), extraordinary (SW), and professional (YM). In verbs, Nura is described as one who cares (YH), straightens mistakes (RH, MS), has impact (IS), deserves what Juna gets (YS), be loved (HS), and can work not only at home, but also in the office (SY). In abstract nouns, she is described as having perseverance and sincerity (RF, YK), encouragement (JZ), and kindness (HS). Finally, in concrete nouns, she is described as a house cleaner, friend (RF), and a helper in a humanistic sense (YH), partner, and teacher (IJ).

On the other hand, five participants critically looked at women's work context from some points of view, namely socio-economic backgrounds, education and job opportunities, and the absence of respect to a contributing woman figure. Socio-economically, the male character Juna came from a rich family who owns a large company and after some trials in his life returned to being a successful man, while the female character Nura came from a poor family and despite being heroic remained in the lower status (DP). About education opportunities, SU and SM found that the text attaches higher education opportunities to Juna and fails to acknowledge any formal education attached to Nura. Consequently, without formal education credentials, women are offered a limited number of positions in the job market. Finally, LP and NL observed that, amidst Nura's conscientious heroic role in helping Juna return to success, the male character boss did not include her into the main room, let alone to acknowledge her contribution, during his celebration party. SU interpreted the textbook extract as one in which the image of women is always attached to being slaves, servants, and lust satisfiers, which is different from that of men who can go to school, have good jobs, and gain respect and recognition.

Discussion

The present study set to explore teacher trainees' critical thinking skills on English teaching materials or textbooks especially from the perspective of gender. In analysing a text critically, it is assumed that the participants would exert any knowledge they had, including their religious perspective because a religion normally provides rules and guidance on how its believers face and solve problems. Therefore, the researchers had explicitly asked the participants to analyse the textbook extract in question using their religious awareness in the first stage of data collection and intentionally excluded the mention of the perspective in the second stage of data collection. The purpose of applying the different instructions is to check the teacher trainees' critical ability especially when there is minimal or no external prompt. The findings are discussed below.

Concerning the first research question, the number of the teacher trainees who wrote critical analyses on the unmarried man-woman relationship in the mid-term exam with an explicit instruction to use the religious perspective was 20 out of 38 participants. This bigger number of participants suggests that the togetherness of men and women out of marriage in a lonely place may lead to cohabitation and so this is considered a common serious violation in Muslim societies (Bukhari, 2018, p. 111). On the other hand, only 6 out of 38 participants were critical on the same issue in the final exam that had no explicit mention of the religious perspective in its instruction. This suggests that many Muslims are permissive about men and women out of wedlock staying together in a place when no one reminds them of the serious religious consequences and when the couple do not show their relationships off or keep them away from suspicions by people in the surroundings. In addition, in Indonesian contexts, this type of lifestyle may not occur in the village that normally has very high social cohesion and controls. Instead, this may occur in the city whereby the residents do not really intervene with their neighbours' privacies. However, even though being in the city, the physical context in the text is also not tolerable because for a Muslim woman to increase her social role and involvement, the physical space should be full of light, easily visible, and attended to by some other women (Johnson & Miles, 2014).

About the second research question, the number of the teacher trainees who were critical on women's position at work in the mid-term exam with an explicit instruction to use their religious perspective is seven of 38 participants. This shows a small difference from that in the final exam with no explicit mention of the perspective, namely 5 of 38 participants. These findings imply that the teacher trainees may still find social inequalities towards women as common and normal

practices in their daily life and that they might not have much religious knowledge on the issue of women at work. This finding supports the study by Jabeen, Hameed, and Afzal (2021) that both male and female Muslim students in the higher education still maintain a stereotypical view that women have restricted roles while men have more freedom and contribution to development. These students tend to be left behind with advancements achieved by many Muslim women as discussed in the world context by Offenhauer (2005) and by Qibtiyah (2009), Parvanova (2012) Nurlaelawati and Salim (2013), and Azmi et al. (2014) in the Indonesian context.

From the perspective of English teaching materials, the problematic issues found in the reading text being assessed by the trainees are the issues that have been generally found in other studies. Specifically, in regard to the woman position at work, Abidah and Sutarna (2019) and Hamidah (2017) found that women were depicted as 'less active and sociable' and inferior in English textbook. In fact, this kind of issue could emerge in any English teaching materials and can cause invalid depiction of women's role and status. As confirmed by Mukundan and Nimehchisalem (2008), females' presence in conversation tends to be neglected although it may be substantial. Besides, the majority of the previous studies found that females' roles were primarily depicted to have household responsibilities and with limited or neglected career options outside the house. However, this study results show that these problematic issues were overlooked by most of the teacher trainees. They might not be aware of the normalization they partake in, regarding the problematic issues found in their reading text. This could be the result of positioning school textbooks as unproblematic documents at schools as well as the students' lack of in-depth and firmed-up understanding of women's position in Islam and gender equity perspectives.

Conclusion

This study found that the level of criticality of the teacher trainee participants is in need of inculcation, as the majority of them demonstrated inadequate performance to discern the gender and religion-related issues contained in their reading text. In the mid-term exam, the first issue (unmarried men-women relationship) explicitly asked using the religious perspective was critically attended to by more than half of the participants, while the second issue that was asked explicitly about women's position in professional discourse was critically attended to only by few participants. Whereas, the results of the final test, when the instruction was not explicitly stating the religious perspective and women's position at work, reveals that their critical thinking performances significantly declined. Thus, there was a bigger number of critical participants especially when a religious perspective was prompted and a smaller number when a religious perspective was not prompted in the instruction to do a critical analysis. The findings also imply that many people (not necessarily Muslims) would not adhere to their religious principles if they are not reminded by their significant others, such as family and friends, and influential figures such as community, religious, or government leaders, or teachers as in classroom contexts. These findings confirm that the trainees do need more support and encouragement such as the exposure of criticality-related activities to deepen their understanding of problematic issues such as gender inequality.

The analyses demonstrated by the trainees indicate that extra actions must be taken to develop their criticality in analysing textbooks that is fundamental in their teaching once they become in-service teachers. We argue that designing English teaching materials needs a careful consideration of learners' values. Teachers' ability to choose the right textbook for teaching will greatly affect the social and cultural values implied in the textbook that will influence the mind-set, even the behaviour of their students. In addition, socialization could be strongly perpetrated

by textbooks that means students might unconsciously think that anything they have learned from their textbook is acceptable. Therefore, teacher trainees are strongly suggested to engage actively in criticality-related activities or courses. This may increase their consciousness and awareness level of the fundamental norms and values that are needed to conduct their evaluation.

This research was bound by a particular teaching context and involved a relatively small number of participants of a mono-religious nature. The mono-religious nature was incidental, not meant to be exclusive, and to some extent assumed to represent any religious repertoire. That is, a student or participant of any religion would use her or his religious knowledge to base her or his critical opinions if asked to do so explicitly or even implicitly. Thus, the way criticality was questioned in this research may be highly applicable to the global audience of English language teacher education. Yet, further and bigger studies that aim to find effective means to increase and measure teacher trainees' critical analytical ability need to be conducted.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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